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AUTHOR Arthur, Michael W.; Kuperminc, Gabriel P.
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ABSTRACT

Social competence promotion has emerged as a promising strategy for the prevention of adolescent antisocial behavior. However, although evaluations of social skills training interventions consistently have shown improvements in participants' skill levels, the evidence for long-term behavioral improvements is equivocal. Variables such as social goals, efficacy expectations, and values likely influence an individual's motivation to behave in a socially competent manner. Unfortunately, little is known about relationships among these variables. This study examined relationships between adolescents' social competence, social goals, efficacy expectations, values, and antisocial behavior. Eighty male adolescents targeted by a statewide delinquency and substance use prevention initiative were administered an abbreviated version of the Adolescent Problems Inventory and a self-report measure of delinquent behavior. Their teachers also completed the Child Behavior Checklist. Correlation and regression analyses indicated that social goals, efficacy expectations, and values were related to social competence ratings. Social competence ratings predicted self-reported delinquency, while values and goals were related to teacher-reported externalizing behavior problems. No differences between younger and older adolescents were observed. These findings suggest that social competence promotion interventions address participants' social goals, efficacy expectations, and values. (Author)

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Social Competence Predictors of Adolescent Antisocial Behavior

Michael W. Arthur

Yale University

Gabriel P. Kuperminc

University of Virginia

CG023771

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ABSTRACT

Social competence promotion has emerged as a promising strategy for the prevention of adolescent antisocial behavior. However, although evaluations of social skills training interventions consistently have shown improvements in participants' skill levels, the evidence for long-term behavioral improvements is equivocal. Variables such as social goals, efficacy expectations, and values likely influence an individual's motivation to behave in a socially competent manner. Unfortunately, little is known about relationships among these variables.

This study examined relationships between adolescents' social competence, social goals, efficacy expectations, values, and antisocial behavior. Eighty male adolescents targeted by a statewide delinquency and substance use prevention initiative were administered an abbreviated version of the Adolescent Problems Inventory and a self-report measure of delinquent behavior. Their teachers also completed the Child Behavior Checklist.

Correlation and regression analyses indicated that social goals, efficacy expectations, and values were related to social competence ratings. Social competence ratings predicted self-reported delinquency, while values and goals were related to teacher-reported externalizing behavior problems. No differences between younger and older adolescents were observed. These findings suggest that social competence promotion interventions address participants' social goals, efficacy expectations, and values.

INTRODUCTION

Antisocial behavior among adolescents is a persistent social problem. In 1988, juveniles aged 10 to 18 years accounted for 33 percent of the arrests in the United States for the eight serious crimes that comprise the FBI's Index Offenses, though this age group represents only 13 percent of the population (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1989; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989). Moreover, the current "war" on drugs has increased public attention on efforts to prevent substance use by teenagers. Interventions to promote social competence among children and adolescents are among the forefront of efforts to prevent adolescent antisocial behavior (Hawkins, Jenson, Catalano, & Lishner, 1988; Rhodes & Jason, 1988; Shure & Spivack, 1988; Weissberg, Caplan, & Sivo, 1989; Weissberg, 1990).

These efforts are hindered, however, by the ambiguity of the terms "social skill" and "social competence" (Dodge, Pettit, McClaskey & Brown, 1986; Gresham, 1986; McFall, 1982). Furthermore, while evaluations of social skills training interventions consistently have shown improvements in participants' skill levels (e.g., Durlak, 1983; Gresham, 1985; Shure & Spivack, 1988; Weissberg, Caplan, & Sivo, 1989), the evidence for long-term behavioral improvements is far from clear (Durlak, 1983; Goldstein & Pentz, 1984; Gresham, 1985; Michelson, 1987). Some reviewers have attempted to clarify these terms by defining social competence as an evaluation of an individual's performance within a given social context, and social skills as specific behavioral skills that the individual would need to use to perform competently in a given social situation (Gresham, 1986; McFall, 1982). Others have suggested that variables such as social goals (Parkhurst & Asher, 1985; Renshaw & Asher, 1983), efficacy expectations

(Allen, Leadbeater, & Aber, in press; Bandura, 1980), and values (Allen et al., in press; Allen, Weissberg, & Hawkins, 1989) influence an individual's motivation to behave in a socially competent manner. Unfortunately, little is known about relationships between social goals, efficacy expectations, values, social competence, and antisocial behavior among adolescents (Goldstein & Pentz, 1984; Gresham, 1986; Michelson, 1987).

Aims of the Present Study

This study had the following aims:

1. To examine relationships between social goals, efficacy expectations, values, and social competence ratings.

2. To assess the utility of these variables for predicting self-reported delinquent behavior and teacher-reported externalizing behavior problems.

3. To test for potential differences between younger (ages 11-14) and older (ages 15-18) adolescents in the strength and structure of the relationships among these variables.

METHOD

Eighty male adolescents targeted by a statewide delinquency and substance use prevention initiative were recruited for this study and interviewed by project staff (See Table 1). During the interviews, participants were read seven vignettes drawn from the Adolescent Problems Inventory (API) (Freedman, Rosenthal, Donahoe, Schlundt, & McFall, 1978), in which an adolescent male was confronted with problems involving parents, peers, drugs, school, the police, an employer, and a girlfriend. After each vignette had been read, participants were asked what they would do in that situation, why they would do what they said, and what they thought was the best thing that could happen in that situation. These responses were coded for levels of social competence, prosocial and assertive goal reasoning, and goal competence (Arthur, 1991; Freedman et al., 1978).

The seven social problem vignettes in the API also were used to elicit information about participants' perceptions of self and outcome efficacy (Allen et al., in press; Bandura, 1980), their values concerning a competent response in each situation, and their perceptions of peers' and adults' values.

Participants also completed a self-report measure of delinquent behavior (Elliott, Ageton, Huizinga, Knowles, & Canter, 1983), and their teachers completed the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986). These data were used to test hypothesized relationships among the constructs and to explore potential age-related changes in these relationships.

RESULTS

Pearson correlations and multiple regression analyses indicated that participants' goals, goal reasoning, and perceptions of self efficacy were the strongest predictors of API social competence ratings (See Table 2). Although personal and peer values were significantly correlated with competence ratings, regression analyses indicated that these variables did not add significantly to the prediction of competence ratings after goals, goal reasoning, and self efficacy had been entered into the equation.

Contrary to expectations, only the API social competence ratings significantly predicted self reports of delinquent behavior, although peer values were weakly correlated with SRD (See Table 3). Thus, the best predictor of self-reported delinquent behavior was a competence rating of the behavior participants thought they would exhibit in hypothetical social problem situations.

Participants' competence ratings, goals, values, and perceptions of adults' and peers' values were significantly related to teacher ratings of behavior problems (See Table 3). However, after entering age and race in the regression equation, only personal values significantly predicted teacher ratings on the CBCL.

MANOVAs and multi-sample structural equation models revealed no differences between younger (11-14 years) and older (15-18 years) adolescents in either the mean levels or the covariance structure of these variables.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study suggest the following conclusions:

1. Social goals, efficacy expectations, and values influence adolescents' social problem-solving behaviors.

2. Although goals and values are related to classroom behavior problems, their relationships to delinquent behavior are very weak, at best.

3. The behavior adolescents' expect they would exhibit in hypothetical problem situations is related to their involvement in delinquent behavior and problem behavior in the classroom.

4. Relationships between social competence ratings, social goals, efficacy expectations, values, and antisocial behavior do not change from early to late adolescence.

5. Interventions designed to promote social competence among adolescents should address participants' social goals, efficacy expectations, and values in addition to teaching problem-solving skills.

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TABLE 1

Sample Characteristics (n=80)

Variable:	n	%
Race:		
Black	66	82.5
White	14	17.5
Lives With:		
Both parents	34	42.5
Mother only	37	46.2
Other relative	9	11.3

Variable	Mean	Median	St. Dev.	Skewness
Age	14.5	15.0	2.00	-.097
Grade in School	8.6	9.0	2.04	-.185
Grade Point Avg.	1.87	1.86	1.03	.092
Number of Delinquent Acts	104.2	27.0	175.9	2.478
Social Competence Rating (0-8 scale)	5.12	5.21	0.95	-1.067

TABLE 2

A. Correlations of Competence Components with API Competence Ratings

Competence Component	Pearson Correlation
Goal Competence	.46**
Prosocial Goal Reasoning (PGR)	.63**
Assertive Goal Reasoning (AGR)	-.04
PGR X AGR Interaction	.51**
Self Efficacy	.39**
Outcome Efficacy	.21*
Personal Values	.36**
Adult Values	.15
Peer Values	.39**

*p<.05
**p<.005

B. Regression Equation Predicting API Competence Rating from Competence Components (Controlling for Age and Race)

Predictor	Beta
Age	-.17*
Race	.05
Prosocial Goal Reasoning	.47*
Goal Competence	.26*
Self Efficacy	.25*

Multiple R=.72

*p<.05

TABLE 3

A. Correlations of Social Competence Measures with Self-Reported Delinquency (SRD) and Teacher-Reported Behavior Problems (CBCL)

	SRD[1]	CBCL
Competence Measure	Correlation	Correlation
API Rating	-.34**	-.28*
Goal Competence	-.15	-.30*
Prosocial Goal Reasoning (PGR)	-.10	-.26*
Assertive Goal Reasoning (AGR)	-.05	.02
PGR X AGR Interaction	-.12	-.21
Self Efficacy	-.07	-.06
Outcome Efficacy	-.11	-.19
Personal Values	-.06	-.35**
Adult Values	-.15	-.24
Peer Values	-.21*	-.33**

** p<.005
* p<.05

B. Regression Equations Predicting SRD and CBCL from Social Competence Measures (Controlling for Age and Race)

	SRD[1]	CBCL
Predictor	Beta	Beta
Age	.27*	.00
Race	-.18	-.29*
API Rating	-.30*	----
Personal Values	----	-.33*
	Multiple R=.46	Multiple R=.46

*p<.05

1 Log-transformed Self-Reported Delinquency Score